

Agiña

Jorge Oteiza



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Memorial Aita Donostia, Navarra. 1959

Jorge Oteiza

Edition

Käräjäkivet

**Directors, Coordinators
and Editors:**

Márcia Nascimento

Nuno Costa

Support:

Jenny and Antti Wihuri

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Cromlech on which the

Chapel of Luis Vallet rests

[AFMJO] © Jorge Oteiza

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© Rauno Hilander. Courtesy
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Author:

Jorge Oteiza

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Website:

www.karajakivet.com

E-mail:

info@karajakivet.com

Facebook:

[@karajakivet](https://www.facebook.com/karajakivet)

Instagram:

[@karajakivet](https://www.instagram.com/karajakivet)

Address:

Rua Barjona de Freitas nº5,

1º Esq, 4750-265 Barcelos,

Portugal

Phone numbers:

(00351) 967 366 089

(00351) 963 953 266

Editor's Note

Márcia Nascimento
& Nuno Costa

This issue is dedicated to the Aita Donostia Memorial, located on the peak of Mount Agiña (Lesaka, Navarra). It was designed by the sculptor Jorge Oteiza (Funeral Stele) and the architect Luis Vallet (Chapel) in memory of Father Aita Donostia, pseudonym of José Gonzalo Zulaika y Arregi.¹ It was requested by the Aranzadi Science Society, which chose the site of the memorial that was inaugurated on the 20th June of 1959.

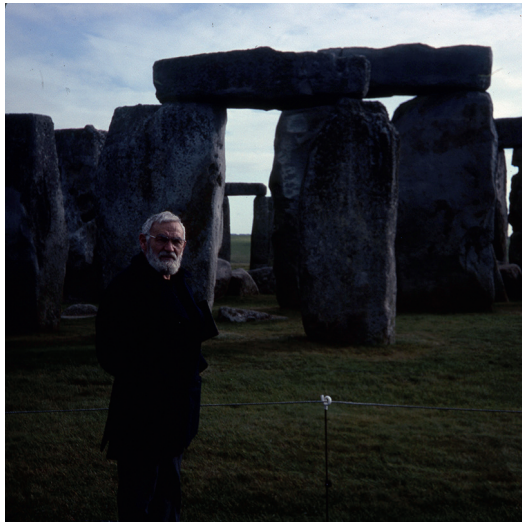
The peak of Mount Agiña contains an important set of megalithic remains composed of 107 cromlechs, 11 dolmens, 4 tombs and 1 menhir. In this sense, we decided to build this issue around the Agiña site and not just the Aita Donostia Memorial. In Agiña, nature, megalithic pre-existence and the monument are part of the same order and form a unique complex impossible to divide. Jorge Oteiza recognizes the author of the cromlech as his artistic predecessor: he is the same man who worked, in another time, in the same landscape. Also, as Manuel Gallego tells us “the confrontation between artifice and nature does not exist. It is the same order the one in which man deciphers, creates and is in.”² The only thing that changes is the time, the great architect ...

Before the monument, Oteiza proposes a reflection on the site and its megalithic pre-existences. In this sense, we have decided to only publish original material letting apart any other interpretation than the ones from the artists themselves. In this regard, we would like to deeply thanks the collaboration of the Foundation Museum Jorge Oteiza in the person of its deputy director Juan Pablo Huércanos for allowing access to the original archives. Special thanks also to Pilar Oteiza, who has unreservedly accepted to allow the reproduction of Jorge Oteiza's original material.

Let's fill our world with stone circles!

¹ José Gonzalo Zulaika, better known as Aita Donostia, is one of the most important figures in traditional Basque music. In addition to being an admired composer, he was also a prominent musicologist who carried out a vast amount of research, compilation and dissemination of the folklore and music of the Basque Country.

² GALLEGO, MANUEL, *Anotaciones al Margen*, Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2007, pag. 74.



Jorge Oteiza next to the cromlech of Stonehenge, England. 1978

[AFMJO] © Jorge Oteiza © Pilar Oteiza, A+V Agencia de Creadores Visuales, 2020

Agiña

- The Basque Cromlech-Statue and its Revelation of the Religious Space ³

Jorge Oteiza, Sculptor

The man from the end of the prehistoric period in the Basque Country, some 4 thousand years ago, built with stones placed in a circle, monuments -the cromlech- whose explanation is not clarified by the sciences that are dedicated to these investigations. We, from our creative reality, from the same professional condition as that of the authors of these monuments, we are going to try an explanation. Spiritually the artist fulfills a type of social and religious function that is very similar in all cultures, and we believe that when the artist comes up with a personal aesthetic solution for his time, he places himself in a privileged position so that, personally, is revealed to him at any time the correspondent moment of creation, even the most remote, in history.

The most important cromlechs are found in England and France. They are huge megalithic alignments in a circular shape, which seem to occupy the center with other stones indicating the orientation of the sunrise and sunset. They were a kind of a city of exclusively spiritual and magical intention, as a spiritual defense of the community, rather than as a material refuge. It is the city first as religious collective protection, sacred site, Church. The humblest cromlechs and that the archaeologist reports almost by compromise, without daring to give them special importance, are -and cannot be humbler in appearance- in some places of the Basque Country. They are small stones that draw a very intimate circle of 2 to 5 meters in diameter and have nothing inside. I believe they are inscribed as signs of an architectural and funerary nature, close to that of the dolmens. For us, if this small type of cromlech were a statue -and it is- it would constitute one of the most important creations of the artist's creative genius of all time and a very timely warning about what we should understand by religious space, now that this central question of the problems of a new religious architecture is discussed.

For us it is wrong the position of the architect and the artist who approach the problems of religious space from the religious point of view. We believe that this is a matter exclusively of an aesthetic nature and we are going to understand it immediately, at the same time as the nature of cromlech and the moment that

³ Extract from the article
-Para un entendimiento
del espacio religioso en la
arquitectura y en el arte-
[For an understanding
of the religious space in
architecture and art] for
the magazine El Bidasoa,
Irun, June, 1959.
Archives FMJO



Basque-Cromlech in Agiña

[AFMJJO] © Jorge Oteiza © Pilar Oteiza, A+V Agencia de Creadores Visuales, 2020

contemporary art lives.

[...] Before completing the dominance of his own soul with the invention of religious space in the metaphysical realism of the cromlech, the artist has already completed -since the bison - reality of the ceilings of Altamira and the walls of Lascaux- an exciting take of possession of his outer and visible world. First the artist deals with explaining what he has in front of him and then putting the inexplicable in an existential solution. With his first attitude he makes an art of communication and temporal expression towards movement. He overcomes his first loneliness, let's call it vital, he teaches the community to participate of the external reality with the same and wise visual sensitivity. This art is a tangible art, whether figurative or non-figurative. Today we also call abstract a similar moment that we are living, a tangible art and not figurative only in relation to the outermost layers of figuration. While the trend of creating exterior spaces as communication does not fall, the creation of internal spaces as spiritual habitability, the spatial silence that defines the abstract, cannot occur. Otherwise: as long as what is receptive is the man and not the spatial consistency of the work, the art will be limited in the tangible and man reduced to a secondary role of spectator. It is the current moment of an art enriched as communication, as nature, pressing, insisting, on the visual sensitivity, half asleep, of modern man, with all kinds of formalistic and spectacular tests.

One day, facing all these small stone circles atop Mount Agiña I thought about my disoccupation of space and, suddenly, I understood all that this empty circle meant. It would not be easy to measure my emotion, when using a statue that for so many centuries had not been used again. It coincided with the spiritual purpose of the prehistoric sculptor of these cromlechs. It was exactly my metaphysical sculpture of my recent experimental conclusion. The stones were not placed from reality but against it, as metaphysical protection.

Before, from the figurative, the magical creator of the Paleolithic, holds the image of the animal (the bison-history) in his cave



Jorge Oteiza next to the remains of a Cromlech, 1965

[AFMJO] © Jorge Oteiza © Pilar Oteiza, A+V Agencia de Creadores Visuales, 2020. Photo: Luis Vallet

paintings inside his material refuge. Now, from the abstract, in this Neolithic cromlech, the artist invents, in the same outer space of reality, the room for his existential roots. Man has put himself outside of himself, outside of reality. Aesthetic solution, religious reason, of his supreme existential anguish.

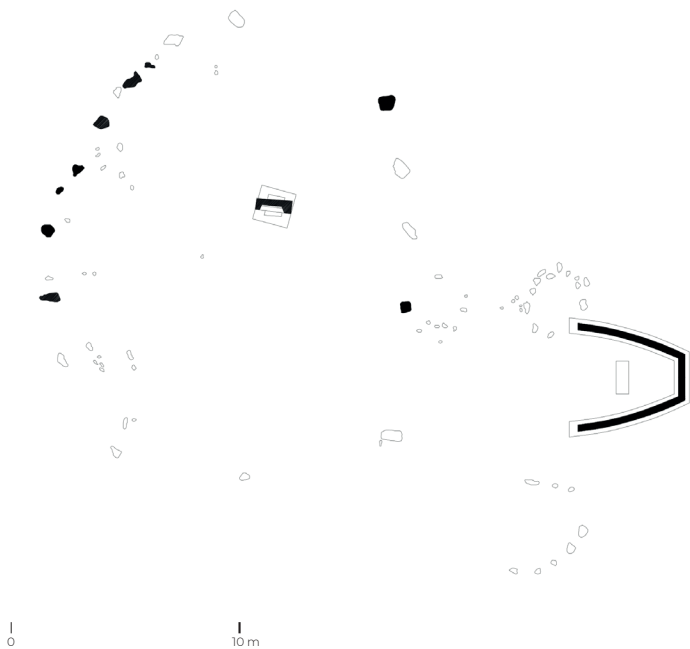
[...] All means of communication (of communication with God in religious art) have to be reduced to pure receptivity, to spatial silence. Everything, we can say, must be reduced to cromlech, to zero as a formal expression.



Memorial Aita Donostia: Funeral Stele and Chapel, Agiña

[AFMJJO] © Jorge Oteiza © Pilar Oteiza, A+V Agencia de Creadores Visuales, 2020





Memorial Aita Donosia in the Megalithic Station - Agiña III (redesigned)
© Aranzadi Science Society

- Agiña: first visit, Autumn 1957 ⁴

"The architect Vallet, with a stake, marked the location of the future monument, the memorial work of Oteiza and the hermitage designed by himself. Someone added that the moss had to invade the landscape collaborating with the work of the two artists.

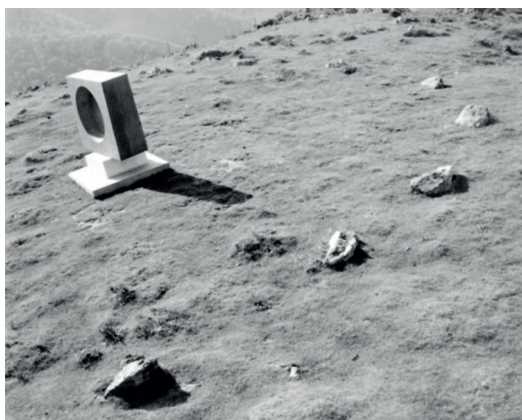
Oteiza knelt with his arms extended out, saying that he wanted to receive the telluric emanations. He looked like a child. Vallet helped him get up.

It was cold ...

Oteiza cast an anxious look over the landscape. He looked like he was in a trance again:

- 'It is essential -he said- to fill our landscape with funerary stelae, with strategically lit signals arranged in this long night that we do not want to arouse. A kind of spiritual batteries, something that speaks to us from its serene vigilant spatiality, while we nervously count our moneys.'"

⁴ The writer José de Arteche, who accompanied Oteiza on his first visit to Mount Agiña, has told his friend's reaction when he saw the stone circles in his book: *Camino y Horizonte*. Archives FMJO



Funeral Stele and cromlech in Agiña

[AFMJO] © Jorge Oteiza © Pilar Oteiza, A+V Agencia de Creadores Visuales, 2020

- Memorial in Honor to Father Aita Donosti, Capuchin Brother and Musician ⁵

We have designed as a remembering in memory of Father Donosti, a complex to be located behind Alto de Biandiz, an area of ancestral survivals and that we would like to form a homogeneous group of forms allied to natural and reminiscent ones. This memorial may be integrated in the following ways: a funeral stele; a humble Chapel and stone benches, all embraced and assembled together by the cromlechs existing there that indelibly mark the continuity in the rite of the remembrance.

The Stele.— It is a black, quadrangular and separated stone, floating on the floor of cromlechs. With an edge split by a perforated circle, the one that faces the entrance to the Chapel, facing the West. The empty circle, slightly off-center, has two perforations, through which, at certain times, morning and afternoon, portions of light will be dropped. These two perforations⁵ go laterally, one high and the other, on the opposite edge, low. This stone must produce an impression of gravity, of loneliness too, of a distant, irredeemable presence, like those of the stones that from our prehistory will accompany it, will accompany it much more, certainly, than we do. The geometric symbolism of the circle and the square, slightly deviated in that indicated place, like an anchor of incessant rotation of the landscape, would like to empty everything, to ignore us with the indifference of everything that is Good and Eternal, to make us pray and feel how little we are.

The Chapel.— It takes the form of a simple inclined paraboloid, sat on the ground and that will only cover the altar of the votive Sacrifice. All the attention of the spectator and actor of the drama of memory, will converge on the Altar illuminated by the new light that comes from the East. The geometric paraboloidal shape adopted will try to give the sensation of condensing and bringing together all the sounds and music of Basque nature, as the great musicologist we are commemorating did.

The cromlechs and benches.— They must be the union between the Stele and the Chapel, forming the homogeneous binder, both in space and time, of the Memorial.

⁵ Memory of the project by Jorge Oteiza and Luis Vallet published in the magazine *Munibe* (Year IX, n°3), 1957. Archives FMJO



Chapel and cromlech in Agiña

[AFMJO] © Jorge Oteiza © Pilar Oteiza, A+V Agencia de Creadores Visuales, 2020

Constructive data.— As technical data we will indicate that the Stele should be executed with black Marquina stone polished in the upper quadrangular part; also black stone from Marquina, the slab that serves as the base, but this slab is unpolished, and the stone that will support the tall quadrangular stone is made of light yellowish limestone.

The Chapel was designed to be made of reinforced concrete, a material from our era that is as imperishable as Neolithic materials; this concrete will be left without any covering, just as it comes out of the formwork; the Ara will be made of limestone, as well as the slabs of the floor, all of it barely rough; we believe that should be placed a door with the entire width of the chapel, which may be metallic,⁶ to prevent animals from entering its interior. The exterior benches⁶ will also be made of limestone just rough.

All this complex, located in the site of the cromlechs, with the mountains of the Basque Pyrenees and the Cantabrian, up to Donosti, in the background, we would like it to make us feel out of place, strange, alone in the natural Church of this place, offering with the stillness and silence of the place, a perennial memory of Father Donosti, the closest and highest example, for us, of aesthetic and religious value of salvation.

⁶ These elements were never realized.



Funeral Stele (damaged)

[AFMJO] © Jorge Oteiza © Pilar Oteiza, A+V Agencia de Creadores Visuales, 2020

I found the stone very badly treated,
its edges bruised,
I found it suffered, aged
more whole and beautiful
indestructible, more alive and spiritual
than ever.⁷

⁷ It is essential to recall that the stele on Mount Agiña was seriously damaged on 30 November 1992. These statements emerge when later, Oteiza went to Mount Agiña and found his stele.
Archives FMJO

Jorge Oteiza

- 1908** Jorge Oteiza was born in Orío, Gipuzkoa.
- 1934** He exhibits with Narkis Balenciaga and Nicolás Lekuona at the Kursaal in San Sebastián.
- 1935** He moves to South America, where he will develop extensive artistic work.
- 1938** Ceramic teacher in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Popayán (Colombia).
- 1948** He returned to Bilbao.
- 1950** He undertakes the creation of the sculpture for the Arantzazu Basilica (Oñati, Gipuzkoa), designed by F. Javier Sáenz de Oiza.
- 1954** The Bishopric of San Sebastián censures its statuery in Arantzazu.
- 1957** Grand Prize for Sculpture at the IV Bienal de São Paulo (Brazil).
- 1959** Memorial Aita Donostia, Agiña, (Navarra).
- 1963** Edit Quousque tandem...! Essay of aesthetic interpretation of the Basque soul.
- 1969** The placement of the Statuary in the Basilica of Arantzazu concludes.
- 1976** His works are exhibited at the Venice Biennale.
- 1985** Gold Medal for Fine Arts, awarded by the Ministry of Culture.
- 1988** Prince of Asturias Award for the Arts.
- 1992** He donates all his work to Navarra for the creation of the Foundation Museum of Jorge Oteiza in Alzuza.
- 1996** Receives the Pevsner Award (Paris) as recognition for all his work.
- 1998** Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of the Basque Country.
- 2003** He died on April 9 in San Sebastián.
Inauguration of the Oteiza Museum, designed by F. J. Sáenz de Oiza.



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Finnish word meaning “court stones” or “circle of stones”: places of judgment (originally iron age graves), where judgments were held and justice carried out, accordingly to the Finnish National Board of Antiquities.

In the ancient times, they were important places where the primitive leaders of the North got together in order to discuss and decide about common matters.

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